

Witness Name: Shan Morgan

Statement No: 1 in M2B

Exhibits: 107

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UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAME SHAN MORGAN

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 7 June 2023 and referenced M2/WG/SM/01 and addressed to me in my capacity as the former Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government.

I, Shan Morgan, will say as follows: -

Introduction

1. Before I address the substance of the request, I should like to express my deep personal sympathy to all those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and my sincere condolences to those who suffered bereavement. I hope very much that this Inquiry will be able to provide valuable lessons for the future.

Background and qualifications

2. I was born in London of Welsh speaking parents. I attended South Park Girls' High School in Lincoln, Wycombe High School in High Wycombe and then the Royal Latin School in Buckingham. I attended the University of Kent and in 1977 I graduated with a BA Hons in French Literature and Language.
3. My early career focused on employment and social affairs policy. In 1977, after I graduated, I joined the Employment Department of the UK Civil Service working on youth and adult employment policy and on vocational education and training

- programmes in the Manpower Services Commission. Thereafter, between 1984 and 1987, I was seconded to the European Commission in Brussels to work on long term unemployment policy and local economic development (the LEDA programme). I returned to the UK Government's Employment Department in 1987 and in 1990 became the Private Secretary to the Permanent Secretary of the department. In 1991, I became a policy official in the National Training Task Force and in 1992 I became the Head of the Employment and Training Strategy Unit at the Government Office for London. In 1994, I worked as the UK's delegate to the International Labour Organization's Governing Body.
4. In 1997, I was seconded to the British Embassy in Paris as Labour and Social Affairs Attaché before taking up my first appointment to the UK Representation in Brussels as the Counsellor responsible for Social, Environmental and Regional affairs. In 2006, I transferred to the Diplomatic Service as Director European Union in the Foreign Office and was responsible for negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty and management of the UK parliamentary process of ratification. Between 2008 and 2012, I was HM Ambassador to Argentina and Paraguay and I was also appointed to the Foreign Office's Board of Management. Between 2012 and early 2017 I was the UK representative to the EU Council's Committee of the Deputy Representatives of the Member States (Coreper I) in the Council. I was responsible for leading negotiations across a wide range of subject areas including climate change, environment, energy, fisheries, social affairs, health, transport and other Single Market issues.
 5. In February 2017, I took up post as the Permanent Secretary for the Welsh Government. I was also appointed Dame Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (DCMG) in 2017. I remained the Permanent Secretary until October 2021 when Andrew Goodall was appointed to the role and I retired from the Civil Service.
 6. This statement relates to the period 21 January 2020 to 30 May 2022 ("the specified period"), though as just noted, I left the Welsh Government in October 2021. In the time that has passed between my departure from the Welsh Government in October 2021 and the preparation of this witness statement in the summer of 2023, my detailed memory of some of the events that took place during the specified period has faded, and I have been assisted in this regard by the contemporaneous documents that have been provided to me by the Welsh Government's inquiry team wherever possible. Where this is the case, I have indicated as much in the text that follows.

7. I would also like to make clear that, as I express throughout this statement, it is my view that the Welsh Government responded appropriately to the unprecedented demands of the pandemic, relying on the information that was available to the Welsh Government at the time. I also acknowledge that the nature of the available information is likely to have changed after my departure from the Welsh Government in October 2021, and that I have not been privy to any such developments after this time, and the evidence that I give in this statement should of course be read in that context.

My role as Permanent Secretary

8. As I explained in my First Witness Statement, a copy of which I attach as exhibit **SM/M2B01/01– INQ000185340** my role as Permanent Secretary had three key aspects to it. First, I acted as the Principal Accounting Officer, managing and accounting for the proper expenditure of public money. Second, I was the leader of the civil service of the Welsh Government, responsible for overseeing the capability and well-being of staff. Third, I was the Principal Policy Adviser to the First Minister, with responsibility for oversight of the quality of advice presented to Ministers.
9. In practical terms, my responsibility as Permanent Secretary was to ensure that the right people were in the key positions supporting Ministers and that they had the right skills, experience and support to discharge those roles effectively. I was not responsible for detailed policy advice or operational management nor for checking each policy submission to Ministers – this was delegated to the four Directors General, who were, during my time in the Welsh Government, Andrew Slade (Economy Skills and Natural Resources Group, known as ESNR), Andrew Goodall (Health and Social Services Group, known as HSS), Tracey Burke (Education and Public Services Group), and Desmond Clifford (Office of the First Minister Group). It is worth clarifying that as the Civil Service of the Welsh Government spanned a very wide range of policy areas, the Directors General in practice performed a similar role to departmental Permanent Secretaries in Whitehall. Each Director General was responsible for policy and delivery for their own Group. My own Group, the Permanent Secretary's Group, was responsible for HR, finance, governance and other central corporate support functions.

10. I maintained oversight of the quality of advice going to Ministers, and particularly the First Minister, principally through the Welsh Government's Executive Committee (ExCo) and, during the pandemic, ExCovid committee (both of which I address in more detail below), and by testing the quality of policy thinking and advice through what were known as Challenge Sessions and Deep Dives on specific subject areas. I introduced Challenge Sessions long before the pandemic, as a means of bringing together senior officials from different policy areas within the Welsh Government, to discuss complex and cross-cutting issues – such as policy on Early Years, for example. Challenge Sessions were standalone meetings, which I normally chaired, between Director Generals and relevant policy Directors. The meetings ensured that policy leads across different Groups of the Welsh Government were considering all the issues that were relevant to them, which in turn helped ensure the quality of the advice that went to Ministers. The idea was to prevent siloed thinking and to join up different parts of the Welsh Government to ensure a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to complex issues. Follow up actions were identified and owned by the different policy teams involved. Deep Dives developed from this approach, and from the experience of the Welsh Government's preparations for a No Deal Brexit, and were regular agenda items at ExCovid meetings, where they served as an important mechanism by which senior leads were kept informed of and able to raise questions regarding key operational and policy developments in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic. I would emphasise that this aspect of my role did not require me personally to review the content of each and every piece of advice that was submitted to Ministers, either through the Ministerial Advice process or otherwise; this was the responsibility of the senior policy leads who were giving or approving the advice.
11. A significant proportion of my time as Permanent Secretary was taken up in overseeing corporate policy and resources, as well as the wellbeing of the 5,500 or so staff of the Welsh Government.
12. I will set out my performance objectives for the 2020/21 reporting year, which were agreed between me and the First Minister, and subsequently with the Cabinet Secretary, for the three core aspects of my role, and these are exhibited as **SM/M2B01/02 - INQ000299923**. These performance objectives illustrate the focus of my role at that time:
13. As Principal Policy Adviser to the First Minister

- (i) Support the First Minister and Cabinet in the delivery of their priorities in the Programme for Government and the Welsh Government's Legislative Programme, in line with the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
- (ii) Oversee coordination of the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 and recovery action and ensure that resources are deployed where most urgently needed;
- (iii) Identify and mitigate the risks for Wales associated with the end of EU transition;
- (iv) Prepare for a smooth transition to an incoming Government (following the May 2021 Senedd elections).

14. As Leader of the Civil Service of the Welsh Government

- (i) Strengthen the skills and capability of the Welsh Government Civil Service to ensure we have a diverse, confident, skilled and flexible workforce for the future through a programme of change and performance management, and ensure resources are aligned directly with Ministerial priorities;
- (ii) Launch a strategy to ensure that the Civil Service of the Welsh Government becomes an exemplar in the use of the Welsh language;
- (iii) Work towards the First Minister's ambition of creating a single, seamless and effective Welsh public service;
- (iv) Prepare for a smooth transition to a new Permanent Secretary (my successor being appointed in October 2021).

15. As Principal Accounting Officer

- (i) Manage the Welsh Government budget effectively in line with the Principal Accounting Officer's responsibilities;
- (ii) Ensure that a proper and effective system of governance and control is maintained throughout the Welsh Government.

16. In carrying out this role, I had regular, normally weekly, one-to-one meetings with the First Minister. These meetings, which were not minuted, were the principal means by which I was able to keep the First Minister fully updated as to the work being carried out that fell within my remit at any given time. I also attended meetings of the Welsh

Government Cabinet. I intervened in Cabinet meetings rarely and only in my capacity as Accounting Officer and head of the Civil Service of the Welsh Government, usually in relation to the budget for staffing the Welsh Government.

17. I also met and communicated regularly with officials of the UK Government, other Devolved Governments, and local authorities in Wales. For example, I was a member of the long-standing Wednesday Morning Colleagues group (the WMC), which was the group of all UK Departmental and Devolved Government Permanent Secretaries. The WMC existed before the pandemic and met weekly at Cabinet Office in London, originally in person and later, due to Covid-19, remotely. The meetings were chaired by the UK Government Cabinet Secretary, Mark Sedwill and subsequently Simon Case, and provided an opportunity for UK Government to update the Permanent Secretaries of the three Devolved Governments on corporate and policy developments.
18. I also had very good relationships with my Permanent Secretary counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we communicated regularly – usually by telephone – on an informal basis, to update each other about any relevant developments or concerns in our respective nations.
19. I also participated in regular calls with the Permanent Secretaries of the other two Devolved Governments, hosted by Alex Chisholm, the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary. These calls predominantly concerned Civil Service corporate issues rather than policy developments.
20. I had limited direct contact with local government colleagues before the pandemic, but my contact with them increased as a result of Covid-19, which I address later on in this statement.
21. In terms of my accountability, along with all senior Civil Service staff in the Welsh Government, I was part of the Senior Civil Service of the UK. I was appointed through an open selection process run by the Cabinet Office, and in common with all Permanent Secretaries, my contract of employment was with the employing organisation (that is, the UK Government) for a five-year term of appointment. The First Minister of the Welsh Government (then Carwyn Jones) was fully involved and consulted during the selection process and the final appointment was made with his approval, in contrast to Whitehall Permanent Secretaries for whom the approval of the

Prime Minister is required. My contract made it clear that my role was to support the First Minister and the Welsh Government.

22. For all practical purposes I was accountable to the First Minister. I agreed my performance objectives for the year with him, and I was very clear that my role was to carry out his instructions. My formal line management was with the UK Government Cabinet Secretary, with whom I shared the performance objectives I had agreed with the First Minister. I had an annual appraisal with the Cabinet Secretary, which was informed by a discussion that the Cabinet Secretary had with the First Minister in advance, to secure his feedback. Although the Permanent Secretaries of the three Devolved Governments serve different administrations, it is important to recognise that they are all bound by the Civil Service Code, a copy of which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/03 - INQ000066056**.

23. As a member of the Senior Civil Service, I contributed to UK Civil Service corporate leadership, including through membership of the Civil Service Board; by acting as Civil Service Local champion for Wales; as a member of Honours Committees; as a sponsor of the Civil Service Award for Inspirational Leadership; and by carrying out a mentoring role and giving regular speeches to Civil Servants on leadership.

My role during the specified period

24. In 2018 I had taken what is called "partial retirement" from the Civil Service in order to end payments into my pension once I had reached the maximum pension pot allowable. This scheme meant that in addition to ending my pension contributions, my salary was reduced by 20%. Despite this reduction in my salary, I worked full-time hours from the outset of the pandemic and until my retirement in October 2021.

25. I have outlined above my performance objectives for the reporting year 2020/2021. As those objectives demonstrate, overseeing the co-ordination of the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 was one important aspect of my role during the specified period, until I left. It was not however the only aspect of my role, and my other responsibilities, in particular my corporate responsibilities in relation to human resourcing and staff wellbeing, remained a key focus for me throughout the pandemic. I played a key role in very quickly establishing a strong, central team that was responsible for the management of the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19, and the implementation of this central governance structure proved to be an effective

approach, drawing on lessons learned from cross-Welsh Government coordination for a no deal Brexit. This enabled me to continue to carry out my non-Covid-related functions and responsibilities during the specified period, including the challenges of EU transition, delivery of the First Minister's Programme for Government priorities, and preparations for the May 2021 Senedd elections.

Initial stages of the pandemic: January to March 2020

26. I have been asked to describe when and how I first became aware of Covid-19 in my official capacity. It is difficult now to be precise about this but having refreshed my memory by reference to the documents, I can see that I was on the circulation list of an official internal Welsh Government update on the new virus on 30 January 2020. I exhibit a copy of this email, which was sent on behalf of the Minister for Health and Social Services to senior policy officials in Welsh Government, as **SM/M2B01/04 - INQ000298961**.
27. I also exhibit as **SM/M2B01/05 - INQ000298966** a letter that I sent to Senior Civil Servants in Welsh Government on 12 February 2020, informing my colleagues of the steps that they should take if they had recently travelled overseas and were experiencing symptoms.
28. As I explain below, the first meeting of ExCovid took place on 18 February 2020, by which time I was very much aware that the new virus posed a serious threat to public health in Wales as across the rest of the world. My impression was that this was a risk that was appreciated across the board within Welsh Government, and that steps were implemented as quickly as possible to begin to respond to that threat on the basis of what was then known about the virus. In relation specifically to the risk of asymptomatic transmission, about which I have been asked to comment, I do not believe that I had any knowledge beyond that which was given to Ministers by the relevant scientific advisory channels.
29. My impression was that the Welsh Government was, in the initial stages of the pandemic as throughout the specified period, heavily focused on the prevention of health harms to the public. My understanding was that the strategy in the initial stages was to flatten the curve of the increasing number of infections; to avoid large peaks; and to guard against placing unmanageable pressure on the NHS, as an absolute priority. In my view, the decisions made by the Welsh Government, including decisions

in relation to lockdowns and restrictions more generally, were driven and informed by the available evidence and the opinions of experts in the relevant fields, in particular the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales, the Technical Advisory Cell (TAC), and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The CMO for Wales had a strong and effective relationship with the CMOs for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, and regularly reported back to the Welsh Cabinet and other key groups in the Welsh Government, including ExCovid. I understand that the role of TAC and TAG has been addressed in some detail in the response to request M2B-TAG/TAC-01 which has been provided to the Inquiry, and I do not repeat that information here. I was not in any event directly involved in the operation of TAC or TAG, save that I, like many of my colleagues, was amongst the recipients of advice from both groups as an attendee of Welsh Cabinet meetings. I never had any concerns about the quality of any of the medical or scientific advice that came through those channels – I believe that the officials responsible were well-informed and well qualified to provide the information required.

30. I did not have any role in the decision to impose the first national lockdown in March 2020, either within the Welsh Government or in the Welsh Government's engagement with UK Government, and I did not provide any advice in relation to this decision. I nonetheless believe that the decisions made by Ministers, including in relation to the first lockdown, its timeliness and implementation, were the appropriate decisions for Ministers to make on the basis of the available evidence at the time.
31. I was similarly not involved in any decisions made by the Welsh Government in relation to international travel or control of the border between England and Wales, either in the initial stages of the pandemic or at any other time. These were matters that were considered at meetings of the Welsh Government Cabinet, but as explained above, it was not usual for me to contribute directly to these meetings.
32. More generally and beyond the initial stages of the pandemic, I would say that, in my view, the decisions made by the Welsh Government tended – very properly – to err on the side of caution, with the primary aim of protecting public health. In England, there was perhaps a greater concern around the economic harms of the pandemic. This difference in approach, as I perceive it, is in my view likely to be explained, in part, by the fact that there is a higher proportion of the population in Wales who are elderly or vulnerable and who were likely to be disproportionately adversely impacted by Covid-19.

33. I firmly believe that the Welsh Government – and in particular, the First Minister and the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip – rightly had a very strong focus on the vulnerable and at-risk groups in Wales. I think this is shown by initiatives such as the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Covid-19 Advisory Group, chaired by Judge Ray Singh and Dr Heather Payne. My perception was that Welsh Ministers had in mind the profile of the Welsh population at all times throughout the specified period, when decisions were made as part of the response to the pandemic.

Ministerial advice process

34. I have been asked to provide a schedule identifying the core decisions of the Welsh Government in response to the pandemic which were made via the Ministerial Advice process rather than through Cabinet. I understand that this is something that is in process within the Welsh Government and will be provided separately to the Inquiry. I have already explained that it was not part of my role to review the content of each and every piece of advice that was submitted to Ministers, and so I do not have direct knowledge of those Ministerial Advice. I understand that the Ministerial Advice process has been explained in Andrew Goodall's witness statement, M2B-WG-01 and I do not repeat that information here.

21-day review process

35. I have been asked to explain my role in the 21-day review process. As an attendee of Cabinet meetings, I was normally present when the 21-day reviews took place, and I was provided with the materials on which those reviews were based. I felt that the decisions made as part of the review process were strongly evidence-based, and subject to rigorous assessment and debate. In particular, a great deal of caution was exercised whenever decisions were made to lift restrictions.

36. I was not however personally involved in the decisions made as part of the 21-day reviews, nor in the advice that was provided to Ministers to inform those decisions. This was the role of the team led by Reg Kilpatrick, which I outline further on in this statement. My primary role was to respond to Ministerial priorities by reallocating staff resources where necessary to carry out the 21-day review process.

ExCo and ExCovid

37. As Permanent Secretary, I chaired the Welsh Government's Executive Committee, known as ExCo, which was the operational and strategic decision-making forum that provided support to me in my role as Permanent Secretary. During my time as Permanent Secretary, membership of ExCo included the four Directors General and other senior policy officials. ExCo met weekly and made formal delegations to the Finance and Corporate Services Sub-Committee, which provided strategic leadership to the operational delivery of the Welsh Government's corporate services. ExCo was a decision-making forum, with a focus on corporate and resourcing issues, rather than policy issues.

38. In February 2020, I established ExCovid alongside ExCo. The first meeting of ExCovid took place on 18 February 2020, and I continued to act as chair until I left the Welsh Government in October 2021. I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/06 - INQ000182393** ExCovid's Terms of Reference. The purpose of ExCovid was to bring together Directors General, Directors, and other key officials from across the Welsh Government, in order to provide regular, senior level oversight and monitoring of the Welsh Government's response to the Covid pandemic. ExCovid was primarily an information sharing forum which provided high level assurance that the Welsh Government had an effective and joined-up response to the crisis in place. This function was fulfilled in part by subject-specific Deep Dives, which I have already mentioned. The Deep Dives that took place as part of ExCovid were valuable, often in relation to significant policy issues that would not otherwise have come to the attention of the full range of officials who were represented on ExCovid. For example, I remember being particularly struck by the Deep Dive session on harms to children and young people from Covid-19 variants, which took place at the meeting of ExCovid on 18 May 2021, presented by Claire Bennett (the Director of the Welsh Government's Communities and Tackling Poverty Directorate, as it then was) and Karen Cornish (head of the Directorate's Children and Family Division, as it then was). I exhibit the minutes of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/07 - INQ000300017** and the presentation slides for that Deep Dive as **SM/M2B01/08 - INQ000299889**.

39. Another standard process adopted by ExCovid was the implementation of a risk register, which was a document that recorded the extremely broad range of operational risks that the Welsh Government faced as a result of the pandemic. The risk register showed risks by issue and by the different Groups of the Welsh Government. The

severity of each of these identified risks was assessed and scores recorded on the register, which was updated regularly. This process ensured that risks were constantly being monitored and mitigations considered. I exhibit, by way of example, the risk register as it stood in May 2021 as **SM/M2B01/09 – INQ000299956**.

40. ExCovid was not a policy decision-making committee – all policy decisions were taken by Ministers. It gave me assurance that potential risks had been correctly identified and mitigated, that there was a shared understanding across the organisation of latest developments, that the right resources had been deployed to essential tasks, and that the necessary actions were being progressed across the whole of the Welsh Government.
41. In establishing ExCovid, I followed the same model that I had used when setting up what came to be known as BrExCo – a cross-governmental coordinating committee, the purpose of which was to bring together key officials to address the wide spectrum of policy and operational issues expected to flow from a No Deal Brexit. That approach had worked well to ensure that the Welsh Government engaged in effective and coordinated strategic planning for a No Deal scenario. I was keen to adopt the same approach to the management of the Welsh Government's Covid-19 response, given that this was a 'tried and tested' method.
42. The core membership of ExCovid included the four Directors General, as well as the head of Legal Services, the HR and Finance Directors, the Director of Governance, the head of Communications, and NR the head of the military team that was embedded within the Welsh Government and who provided particularly helpful advice and assistance in relation to resource planning as part of the response to the pandemic. Reg Kilpatrick was also a member of ExCovid in his capacity as the Director with responsibility for civil contingencies and emergency planning, and the Chief Medical Officer regularly attended to provide crucial updates on medical and scientific developments. Deputy Director, and from July 2021 onwards, Interim Director for Recovery and Restart Liz Lalley also played a crucial role in the running of ExCovid, by liaising with policy officials across the organisation to ensure that all relevant issues were identified as agenda items, and by ensuring that agreed action points were communicated to relevant officials and followed up. ExCovid met twice weekly between February and May 2020, and thereafter on a weekly basis. I exhibit a chronology of those meetings as SM/M2B01/10 - INQ000350814 along with an example set of minutes for the meetings of 18 February 2020 **SM/M2B01/11 -**

INQ000299963 and 10 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/12 - INQ000299016**. I would ask the Inquiry to note that during the period from 10 March 2020 until August 2020, ExCovid meetings were recorded by way of an action log only, rather than minutes. Minutes were taken of the meetings that took place before and after this period.

43. ExCovid continued to operate as a separate forum until I left the Welsh Government. I understand that its remit was subsequently transferred to ExCo.

Permanent Secretary's Delivery Board

44. As part of my responsibility for ensuring delivery of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, I established the Permanent Secretary's Delivery Board. This Board, attended by Directors General and senior policy officials, was tasked with overseeing the operational delivery of the First Minister's Programme for Government and the priorities agreed as part of the Counsel General's future recovery work. It did not address Covid-19 issues specifically but provided central coordination and oversight of delivery of the Welsh Government's policy and operational priorities. It was not a decision-making body but carried out regular stocktakes of progress and helped unblock any cross-cutting issues. I exhibit, by way of example, copies of the Chair's Brief for the meeting of the Board on 3 August 2020 **SM/M2B01/13 - INQ000299529** and on 8 September 2020 **SM/M2B01/14 - INQ000299494**, and draft minutes of the meeting on 11 February 2021 **SM/M2B01/15 - INQ000299626**.

Creation of the post of Director General for Covid Coordination, and the Covid-19 central team

45. In September 2020, following discussions between me, the four Director Generals, and NR and with agreement of the First Minister, it was decided that I would create a new post of Director General for the Welsh Government's Covid-19 response, with a new team working directly under that person. The new Director General role, which came to be known as Director General for Covid Coordination, was to be responsible for the emergency preparedness and response of the Welsh Government to the pandemic, including the development and cross-departmental implementation of all Covid-19-related policy. I decided that Reg Kilpatrick was the obvious candidate for this role given his experience in emergency planning and the valuable contribution he had made as a member of ExCovid, and because of the

crucial role that he had played in coordinating the Welsh Government response since the beginning of the pandemic. This role had not been formalised before this time. In effect, assigning Reg Kilpatrick to the post of Director General for Covid Coordination in September 2020 simply substantiated the role that he had occupied since the beginning of the specified period. For completeness, I would also note that, in the very early stages of the pandemic, Tim Render had also, on my instigation, taken a role in coordinating the policy response to the pandemic, and I exhibit an email thread of 20 March 2020 relating to that decision **SM/M2B01/16 - INQ000299055**. Tim Render eventually returned to his previous role as a Director within ESNR, while Reg Kilpatrick continued to work on Covid-19 policy coordination.

46. Reg was formally appointed to the role of Director General for Covid Coordination, on the basis of a temporary six-month promotion, on 28 September 2020, and I exhibit my email to him of 24 September 2020 as **SM/M2B01/17 - INQ000299583**. The temporary promotion was renewed in March 2021.

Creation of post of Director for Recovery and Restart

47. I was also involved in the establishment of the Recovery Secretariat, headed by the Director for Recovery and Restart, which was implemented in June 2020 on my advice to the First Minister. I exhibit my email to the First Minister on 4 June 2020 setting out my proposals, which were ultimately accepted by him, as **SM/M2B01/18 - INQ000299364**.
48. The Recovery Secretariat sat in my own Permanent Secretary's Group, and the Director for Recovery and Restart reported directly to me. During my time in the Welsh Government, the role was entirely separate to that of Director General for Covid Coordination – the difference between the two being that the Director for Recovery and Restart was focused on forward planning, while the Director General for Covid was responsible for the ongoing crisis management.
49. Simon Brindle was appointed as Director for Recovery and Restart on 15 June 2020, and he remained in post until I left the Welsh Government.

Meetings with Local Government

50. I also had increased contact with local government during the specified period. I and the four Director Generals decided to engage directly with Welsh local government colleagues by attending meetings convened by Chris Llewellyn, Chief Executive of the WLGA, with local authority Chief executives. This enabled us to exchange views on the response by the Welsh Government and Local Government to the pandemic. Reg Kilpatrick attended these meetings, initially in his Local Government Director role, and subsequently as Director General for Covid Coordination. We attended these meetings to exchange information and views on Covid-19 developments, issues to resolve, and local recovery planning. The meetings were regular but not frequent and supplemented the extensive engagement between local authority Chief Executives and individual Directors General. They were intended as a means of improving communications and strengthening collaboration at official level. Welsh Government Ministers had longstanding close relations with the Leaders of the Local Authorities. I exhibit, by way of examples, the agenda for the meeting on 1 May 2020 and the note that was prepared for me in advance of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/19 - INQ000299250** and **SM/M2B01/20 - INQ000299251**, and feedback from Chris Llewellyn following the meeting on 1 May 2020 as **SM/M2B01/21 - INQ000299275**.

51. These meetings provided an important additional forum in which local government could feed back to officials of the national government of Wales on Covid-19-related developments 'on the ground', including any issues that local authorities were encountering with implementation of Covid policy at local level.

Meetings with WLGA

52. In addition to my attendance at the meetings with local authority leaders and Chief Executives, I also met with Chris Llewellyn of the WLGA on a one-to-one basis on 4 September 2020 and on 21 December 2020. My recollection is that these meetings were established directly in response to Covid-19, though Chris Llewellyn would also use the time to discuss business-as-usual topics unrelated to the pandemic (for example, decarbonisation policy and local government elections), as well pandemic recovery planning. I exhibit the briefing notes that were provided to me for the purpose of both those meetings as **SM/M2B01/22 - INQ000300043** and **SM/M2B01/23 - INQ000300042**; I also exhibit an email that I sent to colleagues on 31 December 2020, updating them about the meeting on 21 December 2020, as **SM/M2B01/24 - INQ000299744**.

Meetings with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)

53. I was also in contact during the specified period with the Chair of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Rob Thomas, who is also the Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
54. My communication with Rob Thomas during the specified period followed a letter that Mr Thomas sent to me on 12 June 2020 **SM/M2B01/25 - INQ000300040**, inviting me to a meeting with SOLACE Wales representatives, in order to discuss how SOLACE planned to work with its local authority leaders and with national Government, as part of the recovery from the pandemic. I replied to Mr Thomas' letter on 26 June 2020, confirming that I would be delighted to meet with him and with SOLACE members. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **SM/M2B01/26 - INQ000300041**.
55. That meeting took place on 7 August 2020, and I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/27 - INQ000299545** the briefing note that was prepared for me by my team. Also in attendance on 7 August 2020 were Reg Kilpatrick and Tracey Burke, as well five other Chief Executives from SOLACE and Chris Llewellyn on behalf of the WLGA. I understand that, prior to the meeting that I attended on 7 August 2020, Reg Kilpatrick and Tracey Burke had met with Rob Thomas separately on 1 July 2020 (I understand that this meeting was not minuted). The purpose of both the meetings was to discuss joint working between the Welsh Government and local authorities in the recovery from the pandemic. These contacts helped strengthen further the communication and relationships between Welsh Government and local government officials.

Meetings with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action

56. I also began to meet regularly with Ruth Marks, the Chief Executive for the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), during the specified period and until I left the Welsh Government. The WCVA played an invaluable role in bringing together the many volunteers who provided support to the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19, in particular, in relation to the shielding initiative. My meetings with Ruth were informal, without an agenda and not minuted. Their purpose was to strengthen communications and to exchange views.

Informal 'Quintet' meetings

57. At the beginning of the specified period, I established regular, informal meetings between myself and the four Director Generals. These meetings, which were referred to as the 'Quintet' meetings and which were not minuted, enabled the five of us to provide mutual support and to discuss informally any issues or challenges or concerns that we were encountering in our respective roles. No decisions were made at these meetings, but they were nonetheless an extremely helpful forum in which the five of us were able to speak freely about anything that was concerning us and to benefit from hearing the views of colleagues, which was very valuable during an extremely intense period. I believe that having this informal safe space to talk both reinforced the trust between officials and helped strengthen the resilience of the senior team.

Inter-Ministerial meetings

58. The Welsh Government also established very regular (usually daily) Ministerial meetings at the beginning of the pandemic. These meetings were around half an hour at the beginning of the day and provided Ministers with an opportunity to share information regarding developments in their respective areas and to discuss possible next steps, particularly regarding the introduction or easing of restrictions. The meetings were attended by all Ministers, and by senior officials (including myself, the Director Generals, and the relevant Directors). They were not formally minuted, but the First Minister's Private Secretary would often circulate an email note of what had been discussed at the meeting to those in attendance. I exhibit, by way of example, the emails sent further to the meetings on 22 December 2020 **SM/M2B01/28 - INQ000299745**, 21 January 2021 **SM/M2B01/29 - INQ000299765**, 25 February **SM/M2B01/30 - INQ000299795**, and 25 March **SM/M2B01/31 - INQ000299850**.

Covid Core meetings

59. In March 2020, the First Minister established his 'Covid Core' Group, which met every Wednesday morning until around September 2020. The leader of Plaid Cymru, Adam Price MS, and the leader of the Welsh Conservatives, Paul Davies MS, both attended these meetings, along with senior Welsh Government officials. Ruth Marks, head of the WCVA, normally attended. I attended in order to ensure that I was up to date on

issues and developments but was not called upon to give presentations. Instead, technical updates were provided by Frank Atherton and Andrew Goodall.

Communication with UK Government and with the other Devolved Governments during the specified period

60. I also attended or was represented by relevant senior Welsh Government policy officials at, regular, initially daily meetings hosted by the then UK Cabinet Secretary, Mark Sedwill. Senior officials from UK Government departments as well as the other Devolved Governments also attended. These were known as Cabinet Secretary (O) meetings, or Covid (O) meetings, the "O" indicating "officials". These meetings ran in parallel to the COBR meetings, which were of course at Ministerial level, and one important function of the O meetings was to discuss issues and briefings that needed to be considered by Ministers at COBR meetings, for example relating to the impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions across different policy areas.

61. The Covid (O) meetings usually included a report of the latest figures for Covid-19 deaths and infection levels, as well as updates from the Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) (which I understand have been explained in the witness statements of Welsh Government colleagues, in particular M2B-WG-01), and any other topics of relevance, such as testing, vaccination, and public health communications. No decisions were made at these meetings but the information that was shared at the meetings was fed through to Ministers (both at COBR meetings, and more generally within the Welsh Government) and consequently helped inform decisions that were made.

62. I do not believe that these meetings were minuted, but my practice was to compile a brief note of the discussions (referred to within the Welsh Government as a "read out") which I then circulated to my senior policy colleagues. I exhibit, by way of example, the read outs that I circulated for the Covid O meetings that took place on 5 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/32 - INQ000298978**; 19 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/33 - INQ000299028**; 25 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/34 - INQ000299069**; 26 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/35 - INQ000299074**; 30 March 2020 **SM/M2B01/36 - INQ000299098**; 1 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/37 - INQ000299103**; 2 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/38 - INQ000299114**; 6 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/39 - INQ000349284**; 9 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/40 - INQ000299145**; 16 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/41 - INQ000299167**; 20

April 2020 **SM/M2B01/42 - INQ000299258**; 21 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/43 - INQ000299257**; 22 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/44 - INQ000299219**; 27 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/45 - INQ000299256**; 30 April 2020 **SM/M2B01/46 - INQ000299255**; Over time, the frequency of these meetings reduced.

Continued Wednesday Morning Colleagues meetings

63. The WMC meetings which I referred to above continued throughout the specified period, and the Covid-19 response remained a key focus of the meetings that I attended until I left the Welsh Government in October 2021. The WMC meetings were not minuted. They were an opportunity for the UK Government Departmental Permanent Secretaries to provide updates as to any significant Covid-19-related policy decisions or developments within their respective policy areas, and the Permanent Secretaries of the Devolved Governments were always invited to, and did, provide updates as to developments in their nations as well. I found that these meetings contributed to the positive working relationships at official level between the UK Government and the Devolved Governments.

Permanent Secretaries' Covid-19 meetings

64. During the specified period, I and the Permanent Secretaries for Scotland and Northern Ireland also attended regular informal four-way meetings with the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Health and Social Care, Chris Wormald, who established these meetings in order to exchange views on Covid-19 developments and to share information. The first of these meetings took place on 6 March 2020 and they continued regularly throughout the specified period. The meetings worked well and, in my view, they are a good example of effective communications between senior officials of the four nations during the pandemic. I exhibit, by way of example, the read outs that I circulated for the meetings that took place on 6 March 2020 and 3 April at **SM/M2B01/47 - INQ000298979** and **SM/M2B01/48 - INQ000299128**.

COBR

65. I attended most of the COBR meetings that took place during the specified period and until I left the Welsh Government but did not intervene at those meetings which were

intended as a forum for Ministers, and I was not involved in any of the COBR sub-groups.

Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

66. I have been asked to comment as to the reasons why the role of Minister for Intergovernmental Relations was created within UK Government in September 2021 and whether it was intended to have any impact on the effectiveness of 4-nation decision making in response to Covid-19. I understand that the role was created further to a report by UK Government on Intergovernmental Relations, but beyond that I do not have any specific knowledge as to the decision. My own impression was that the Minister had a good understanding of the responsibilities of the Devolved Governments and how our different administrations operated.

Engagement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission during the specified period

67. On 3 July 2020, I received a letter from Rev Ruth Coombs, Head of Wales at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). In that letter, which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/49 - INQ000299398**, Ruth Coombs raised concerns around the publication of equality impact assessments (known as EIAs) relating to the various Covid-19 regulations, announcements and guidance produced by the Welsh Government.

68. I sent a reply to this letter, drafted by Welsh Government policy officials and approved by me, on 4 August 2020. I exhibit that reply as **SM/M2B01/50 - INQ000299540**. In the reply, I referred to the Welsh Government published documents "Leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic: a framework for recovery" (24 April 2020, exhibited as **SM/M2B01/51 - INQ000066064**) and "Unlocking our society and economy: continuing the conversation" (15 May 2020, exhibited as **SM/M2B01/52 - INQ000066065**). I also referred to the various equality assessments that the Welsh Government had published up until that time on the 21-day reviews. I exhibit those documents as follows: 18 June 2020 (**SM/M2B01/53 - INQ000087147**); 6 July 2020 (**SM/M2B01/54 - INQ000087143**); 9 July 2020 (**SM/M2B01/55 - INQ000087142**); 16 July 2020 (**SM/M2B01/56 - INQ000087141**). I explained that further impact assessments relating to Covid-19 regulations and guidance would be published in due

- course and that I had asked the Welsh Government's Restart and Recovery Directorate to notify the EHRC when that took place.
69. My reply to Rev Ruth Coombs on 4 August 2020 was sent alongside, and indeed enclosed, a separate letter sent by the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, to the Chair of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, John Griffiths MS, on the impact of Covid-19 on equality and human rights. I exhibit a copy of that letter, which is dated 3 August 2020, as **SM/M2B01/57 - INQ000299537**.
70. Following this exchange of correspondence, I had a meeting with Rev Ruth Coombs on 9 September 2020. I exhibit the agenda and a copy of the briefing note that was provided to me for the purpose of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/58 - INQ000299571**.
71. I then had a further exchange of correspondence with Ruth Coombs in February and March 2021. I exhibit Ruth Coombs' letter of 3 February 2021 as **SM/M2B01/59 - INQ000299770**; my reply of 12 February 2021 as **SM/M2B01/60 - INQ000299775**; Ruth Coombs' reply to me of 25 February 2021 as **SM/M2B01/61 - INQ000299794** and my reply of 10 March 2021 as **SM/M2B01/62 - INQ000300236**). This correspondence related to the EHRC's concerns that the Welsh Government had not published a complete set of equality impact assessments relating to all changes in Covid-19 measures.
72. As a result of this correspondence, I met again with Ruth Coombs on 12 April 2021, along with NR from the Welsh Government's 21-day review team. I exhibit the note of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/63 - INQ000299854**. This was a productive meeting at which I and NR explained that there was sometimes a delay in finalising and publishing the relevant summary impact assessments due to competing demands on resources and translation timescales, particularly in that translation teams needed to prioritise the translation of the regulations and associated guidance themselves, before the summary impact assessments could be translated.
73. As arranged at the meeting on 12 April 2021, I had a follow-up meeting with Rev Ruth Coombs on 30 June 2021. I was accompanied at this meeting by Alyson Francis, then Deputy Director and head of the Communities Division within the Welsh Government's Communities and Tackling Poverty Directorate (CTPD). I exhibit the agenda for that meeting as **SM/M2B01/64 - INQ000299940**, the briefing that was prepared for me as

SM/M2B01/65 - INQ000299941, and a note of the meeting as **SM/M2B01/66 - INQ000299881**. This was a broader meeting touching on a range of equality related topics, but we also discussed the current process then in place for the publication of equality impact assessments in the context of the 21-day reviews.

Involvement in the Race Equality Action Plan for Wales during the specified period

74. In around September 2020, I was asked by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip if I would act as co-Chair, with Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna, of the Steering Group that was being established for the purpose of overseeing the work being done to produce and implement a Race Equality Action Plan for Wales (referred to as REAP). At our meeting, the Deputy Minister emphasised the importance that she and the First Minister attached to this work, hence the request that I engage actively as co-chair of the REAP Steering Group. Professor Ogbonna was the Chair of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Covid-19 Socioeconomic Subgroup, a subgroup of the First Minister's Covid-19 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Group,¹ which had published a report on 22 June 2020 on the key socioeconomic and environmental factors implicated in the disproportionate Covid-19 outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals. I exhibit a copy of that report as **SM/M2B01/67 - INQ000227599**. The report of the Socioeconomic Subgroup made a broad range of immediate and medium-term recommendations, which the Subgroup was then responsible for monitoring. The Welsh Government published its response to the report on 24 September 2020, which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/68 - INQ000300238**.

75. Before the work that was carried out by the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory group and its subgroups, the Welsh Government had already made a commitment in March 2020 to produce a Race Equality Strategy for Wales. This ultimately took the form of the Race Equality Action Plan for Wales. The findings of Professor Ogbonna's Subgroup formed an integral part of the rationale and priorities for the Race Equality Action Plan, which was still in development in June 2022 when the Subgroup's report was published.

76. The purpose of the REAP Steering Group was to provide oversight of and support for the development of the REAP. One crucial aspect of the Steering Group's function

¹ I would like to note at this point that the Welsh Government no longer uses the acronym 'BAME' (see page 4 of the REAP), but I use it here as it was the title then given to the Advisory Group.

was to bring wider perspectives to the development of the REAP from relevant groups: representatives from external organisations such as the EHRC and the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales (EYST) were part of the membership of the Steering Group, along with senior Welsh Government policy officials, as well as the Chair of the First Minister's Covid-19 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Group, Judge Ray Singh, and the Chair of one of the Advisory Group's other subgroups, the Risk Assessment Subgroup, Professor Keshav Singhal.

77. The inaugural meeting of the REAP Steering Group took place on 25 September 2020, co-chaired by me and Professor Ogbonna. I exhibit the minutes of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/69 - INQ000299614** and the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group as **SM/M2B01/70 - INQ000299613**. The Group continued to meet regularly after that, and I exhibit, by way of example, the minutes of the meeting that took place on 17 December 2020 **SM/M2B01/71 - INQ000281867**; the Chair's briefing for the meeting that took place on 15 January 2021 **SM/M2B01/72 - INQ000281873**; minutes of the meeting that took place on 21 May 2021 **SM/M2B01/73 - INQ000299946**; and 15 July 2021 **SM/M2B01/74 - INQ000299936**, plus the Chair's briefing for that meeting as **SM/M2B01/75 - INQ000299846**; and the Chair's briefing for the meeting that took place on 17 September 2021 as **SM/M2B01/76 - INQ000299938**. I also exhibit the papers prepared for a round table meeting with the Wales Centre for Public Policy on the subject of the REAP on 15 January 2021, as **SM/M2B01/77 - INQ000281881**, **SM/M2B01/78 - INQ000281880**, and **SM/M2B01/79 - INQ000281871**. I did not attend this meeting, but I provide those documents in case they are of interest to the Inquiry.

78. A consultation for the REAP was launched on 24 March 2021 which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/80 - INQ000300237**. As part of the consultation process, I hosted an internal "Let's talk Race" event for officials of the Welsh Government on 14 April 2021, where a large number of Welsh Government colleagues convened to discuss their lived experiences. The event was held online and attracted a good attendance from staff of the Welsh Government. The consultation closed in July 2021, and the action plan remained in development when I left the Welsh Government. I understand that the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan was published on 7 June 2022, which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/81 - INQ000227789**.

Engagement with [NR]

79. I had regular catch-up meetings with [NR] who led and managed the Armed Forces team that provided operational assistance and support to the Welsh Government in relation to certain measures during the specified period (for example, testing programmes, and management of vaccination centres). I was not involved in decisions regarding the deployment of the Armed Forces in Wales (including decisions as to how and where this form of support should be utilised), but I communicated regularly with [NR] who provided me with updates as to his team's activities. I asked Colonel Walker to become a member of ExCovid, for the same reason. I found [NR] insight very useful not only because it was helpful for me to understand how the military was contributing to the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 more broadly, and for this to be shared with policy officials via ExCovid, but also because it was very helpful to have [NR] professional perspective and input in relation to resourcing the response to Covid-19, which as I have explained fell within my remit. For example, as I have noted, my decision to create the Director General for Covid Co-ordination role and to appoint Reg Kilpatrick to this post arose in part out of a discussion that I had had with [NR] about internal governance structures.

Engagement with UK Government and the other Devolved Governments in relation to the establishment of the Joint Biosecurity Council (JBC)

80. I understand that the role and function of the JBC has been addressed elsewhere and so I do not repeat that information; I was also not personally involved in either the establishment or the running of the JBC, and so my knowledge of how it operated is limited. I would however refer to the way in which the establishment of the JBC was announced and shared by the UK Government with the Devolved Governments, as an example of engagement with the Devolved Governments that could have been improved.

81. In summary, the Devolved Governments were informed about the impending announcement of the JBC at short notice and before our First Ministers had had the opportunity to confirm their support. I understand that the intention to form the JBC was first raised with the Devolved Governments sometime in May 2020, and that there was broad support for the initiative subject to a number of queries that the Devolved

Governments raised regarding, in particular, the arrangements for governance of the JBC across the four nations. I was not involved in those discussions and did not have any knowledge of the JBC at the time. I understand that the Devolved Governments were then informed that the JBC was set to become operational, before the queries of the Devolved Governments had been addressed. I exhibit an email thread setting out communications between the Devolved Governments on this topic as **SM/M2B01/82 - INQ000299350**. The matter came to my attention because a letter that was sent from the Home Office on 27 May 2020 announcing the “go live” date of the JBC (1 June 2020) was addressed to me as Permanent Secretary, **SM/M2B01/83 - INQ000299353**. It was agreed between the Devolved Governments that a letter in reply would be sent out on a joint basis, on behalf of the Devolved Government Permanent Secretaries, which I approved **SM/M2B01/84 - INQ000216517**.

82. Whilst all the Devolved Governments were supportive of the broad objectives of the proposed JBC, there had been insufficient engagement in advance and as a result we had concerns about the governance, data ownership and involvement of the Devolved Governments in setting the strategic direction, aims and objectives of the JBC. I did not have any further involvement in relation to the JBC during the specified period, and so I am unable to comment as to how it operated after this point. I understand that this is to be addressed by other witnesses who are providing evidence in relation to Module 2B of the Inquiry.

Cabinet Office “Heads of Place” initiative

83. The UK Government’s Heads of Place initiative was designed to strengthen the presence and visibility of the UK Government across the four nations by establishing a number of physical “hubs” in different locations across the UK, bringing together officials from a variety of UK Civil Service departments. This was not a Covid-19-related initiative, but I refer to it because it was underway during the specified period and it may be relevant to the Inquiry’s consideration of the engagement between the Welsh Government and UK Government in that time.

84. There was some discussion of the Heads of Place initiative when it was raised by UK Government at our WMC meeting on 10 June 2020, and I exhibit the note of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/85 - INQ000299384**. I also exhibit discussions by email that

took place as a result of that meeting, between the Devolved Governments and also internally within the Welsh Government **SM/M2B01/86 - INQ000299381** and **SM/M2B01/87 - INQ000299385**.

85. The First Minister's main concern in relation to the initiative was to ensure that there was no confusion over devolved and non-devolved responsibilities in Wales. In particular, it needed to be made clear that any UK Civil Servants who were in Wales as part of these "hubs" and who had responsibility for areas that were devolved (such as health and social services), should not be confused as in any way overlapping with or replacing Welsh Government's competence in those areas. The other Devolved Governments had similar concerns, which are reflected in the email communications that I have exhibited.

86. The Head of Place for Wales was Glynne Jones, Director of the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, and the most senior representative of the UK Civil Service in Wales. I already had good working relations with Glynne Jones, and in my discussions with him, I relayed the First Minister's concerns in relation to the Heads of Place scheme. I felt that Glynne Jones took these observations on board, and I did not have any further concerns about the way that the initiative was managed in Wales.

Use of data

87. I have been asked whether I encountered any challenges in the collection or provision of data by or to the Welsh Government. My only direct involvement in relation to Covid-19 data within the Welsh Government was to receive the regular data updates that were provided to ExCovid by the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytics Service (KAS). These updates were provided as lengthy presentation slides which we were able to discuss at ExCovid meetings and which were always well presented and comprehensive. I exhibit, by way of example, the set of slides provided for the meeting of ExCovid on 25 August 2020 **SM/M2B01/88 - INQ000299564**.

88. I was not otherwise involved in decisions around the use of data by the Welsh Government.

Informal communications

89. I have been asked about any informal communications that I had with my colleagues in Welsh Government. For the relevant period, namely from January 2020 I had 2 mobile phones: a personal mobile phone and a Welsh Government issued mobile phone. The Welsh Government issued mobile phone did not support the use of WhatsApp, as such, any WhatsApp discussion to which I was a party and to which I refer below, took place on my private mobile phone. The private mobile that I had in January 2020 was upgraded around May 2023 at which time, I passed my old phone to a family member. I have, however, been able to access the WhatsApp messages on my new device. The Welsh Government mobile phone that I had was returned to the Welsh Government when I retired from the civil service, having retired at the end of October 2021 and I have not had access to that phone since. I do recall receiving information on the retention of records following the announcements of the Covid Public Inquiry.

90. I was a member of an informal WhatsApp group which I called Five Go Live. The group consisted of myself, Andrew Goodall, Andrew Slade and Tracey Burke all of whom were Director Generals in the Welsh Government at the time the group was established on 9 July 2019. I have retained the WhatsApp messages on my personal phone from 12 March 2020 to 01 November 2021 when I retired from the civil service. The messages from the establishment of the group on 9 July 2019 to 11 March 2020 have not been retained on my phone, whilst I cannot now specifically recall why they are not available, I do occasionally remove messages in order to tidy up my phone and to provide for storage space. In any event, I understand that Andrew Goodall has been able to provide the public inquiry with the early entries on this chat. The purpose of the group was to provide mutual support and rapid contact. It did not provide a forum for making policy decisions, but I have downloaded these messages from my mobile and have made these messages available to the public inquiry.

91. Andrew Goodall and I were also in a separate WhatsApp chat in which we largely discussed meeting arrangements and provided some updates. Both Andrew Goodall and I have been able to recover these messages and have made these available to the public inquiry. Andrew Goodall has provided a more comprehensive chat, as I have deleted some messages by way of housekeeping.

92. I infrequently exchanged text messages with the First Minister, Mark Drakeford on my Welsh Government issued mobile. These were largely update message and I understand these have been recovered from the First Ministers phone and made available to the public inquiry. I occasionally received messages from Jane Runeckles, who is the First Ministers Special Adviser. These messages purely relate to making arrangements for meetings and whilst they do not refer to the pandemic directly, I have made these available to the public inquiry.
93. I was also in a WhatsApp chat with Toby Mason who is the Head of Strategic Communications in the Welsh Government where Toby would update me on Welsh Government communications and these messages have been made available to the inquiry.
94. I was also in an informal discussion on WhatsApp with Andrew Slade who is a Director General within the Welsh Government, and this chat was largely used to discuss meeting arrangements and to provide updates. As I have stated above, I do occasionally delete messages from my private phone as part of a house keeping exercise and as such, this exchange is not complete but to assist the inquiry, I have provided the messages.
95. I have reviewed other WhatsApp messages which I have access too, and which involve people working or having worked in the Welsh Government. Of these messages, I have identified two chats where there is a very brief reference to the WG response to coronavirus during the relevant period, these are discussions with Peter Kennedy, the former HR Director and my former private secretary. I have made these messages available to the inquiry.

Lessons learned

96. At a meeting of ExCovid on 13 October 2020, the minutes of which I exhibit at **SM/M2B01/89 - INQ000221045**, I decided that ExCovid would carry out a lessons learned exercise across the Welsh Government. The lessons learned exercise, which we referred to as a "stocktake", was intended to consider and assess the operational response of the Welsh Government to the pandemic, including anything that could have been done differently and any lessons to be taken forward both in the future

planning in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in relation to planning for the response to pandemics more generally.

97. In order to conduct the stocktake exercise, all Directorates within the Welsh Government were asked to provide information about their own role in the response to the pandemic. I exhibit the template information gathering form, dated October 2020, that was used for this purpose, as **SM/M2B01/90 - INQ000299601** and Liz Lalley's email to the Welsh Government Directorate heads on 9 October 2020 requesting responses by 23 October 2020 as **SM/M2B01/91 - INQ000299600**. I also attach, by way of example, the completed forms that were returned to ExCovid by the Housing and Regeneration Directorate as **SM/M2B01/92 - INQ000066475**, by the Care Inspectorate Wales as **SM/M2B01/93 - INQ000198529**, by the Permanent Secretary's Group as **SM/M2B01/94 - INQ000300004**, and by the Test Trace and Protect team within Health and Social Services Group as **SM/M2B01/95 - INQ000300031**.

98. The stocktake exercise was completed in November 2020, and a summary report was produced which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/96 - INQ000066467**. Liz Lalley presented on the findings of the stocktake exercise at a meeting of ExCovid on 1 December 2020, the minutes of which are exhibited at **SM/M2B01/97 - INQ000221049**.

99. It was also agreed at the meeting of ExCovid on 1 December 2020 that Liz Lalley would compile a summary action plan as part of the lessons learned report. I exhibit the action plan that Liz Lalley produced as **SM/M2B01/98 - INQ000299331**. The action plan set out a series of recommendations and risk mitigations that were delegated to relevant Directors General for direct follow up. In this and other stocktake exercises the lack of resources in the Welsh Government, and impact on staff resilience, was a frequently cited issue. It was a key responsibility of ExCovid to identify areas under particular pressure and to try to find resources – within budget – to move across in the short term to address specific problems. One positive finding of the stocktake exercise was that the new IT system rolled out in October 2019 was successful in enabling new ways of working and effective communications during lockdown. Almost overnight, the Welsh Government became an organisation working online thanks to investment in a high-quality IT system with individual laptops for staff.

100. Having refreshed my memory by reference to the documents, I recall that this general lessons learned exercise was preceded by a more focused lessons learned exercise relating to the local lockdown that was implemented in Caerphilly on 8

September 2020, this being the first local lockdown in Wales. All members of ExCovid contributed feedback to this earlier exercise. I exhibit the slides that were presented at the meeting of ExCovid on 22 September 2020 as **SM/M2B01/99 - INQ000299580** and my email to ExCovid members ahead of that meeting as **SM/M2B01/100 - INQ000299572**.

101. There was a separate lessons learned exercised conducted by ExCovid in relation to the 21-day review process, the findings of which were captured in a report prepared at the end of March 2021 and which I exhibit as **SM/M2B01/101 - INQ000299966**. The findings were discussed at ExCovid on 6 April 2021. I do not have any specific recollection of the details of this exercise, but the documents indicate that it identified, in particular, concerns about the resourcing of the Restart Team, as well as a lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities. Resourcing remained a difficult issue throughout the pandemic as there was an overriding requirement for the Welsh Government to remain within the staff budget allocation. ExCovid acted as a central point for considering requests to move staff across the organisation in response to urgent need. The findings of the 21-day review stocktake were factored into decisions about prioritising allocation of resources by ExCovid.

Evidence to the Senedd

102. During the specified period I gave evidence to the Senedd's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on 3 February 2020, 4 May 2020, 6 July 2020, 23 November 2020, 7 December 2020, and 1 February 2021. I exhibit the transcripts of that evidence as **SM/M2B01/102 - INQ000300231, SM/M2B01/103 - INQ000300229, SM/M2B01/104 - INQ000300232, SM/M2B01/105 - INQ000300235, SM/M2B01/106 - INQ000300233, SM/M2B01/107 - INQ000300230**.

Final comments

103. There are a number of other topics on which I have been asked to comment which are outside the scope of my involvement in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic. For completeness I list these below, in order to provide assurance that these questions have been considered by me in the process of compiling this witness statement, and that the reason that they have not featured in the narrative I

have provided above is simply that they are not matters in which I had any direct involvement, beyond awareness of the decisions taken by Ministers at Cabinet or in other fora. I did not have any involvement in:

- (a) Any discussions around the concept of herd immunity, as a potential strategy or otherwise;
- (b) Any decisions made in relation to so-called “super spreader” events, including the Six Nations rugby match that was due to take place on 14 March 2020, nor the Stereophonics concerts in Cardiff on 14 and 15 March 2020;
- (c) Any decisions made in relation to care homes and hospitals in Wales;
- (d) Any decisions made in relation to shielding;
- (e) Any decisions made in relation to the supply or provision of PPE in Wales;
- (f) Any advice relating to the Covid-19 risk assessment tool;
- (g) Any decisions made in relation to the Welsh Government's taking a divergent approach to that taken by the UK Government;
- (h) Any decisions made in relation to public health communications in Wales;
- (i) Any decisions made regarding the use of public health legislation rather than the Civil Contingencies Act 2004;
- (j) Any advice given in relation to the Coronavirus Act 2020;
- (k) Any advice around the international response to Covid-19.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed

Personal Data

Shan Morgan

Dated: 13/12/2023